



*Knowledge Innovation and Excellence*

# District Level Land Dialogue Report

## District Stakeholders' Understanding of the Current Land Context, the Customary Land Act (2016) and their Desired Future amongst DEC members in Salima District

By

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Malawi National Learning Alliance on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification

December 2019



UNIVERSITY  
of  
GREENWICH | Natural  
Resources  
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**Citation:**

Jessica Kampanje-Phiri, Daimon Kambewa, Masautso Chimombo, Mayamiko Nathaniel Kakwera, Hastings Chiwasa, Patricia Ngwale, Owen Lupesya, McDonald Galimoto (2019), District Stakeholders' Understanding of the Current Land Context, the Customary Land Act (2016) and their Desired Future amongst DEC members in Salima District. Malawi National Learning Alliance on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Land Dialogue Report No 11, December 2019. LUANAR, Lilongwe and University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi. <https://sairla-africa.org/resources/district-level-land-dialogue-report-salima-district/>

**Acknowledgements:**

Thanks go to the Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) programme for initiating the research in 2016; to the UK Department for International Development (DFID), for financial support; to WYG and the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) for their support, guidance and encouragement; to the members of the District Executive Committee (DEC) in Salima District in Malawi who participated in the dialogue sessions; and reviewers for useful comments.

**About SAIRLA - [www.sairla-africa.org](http://www.sairla-africa.org)**

Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) is a five-year, DFID-funded programme (2015–2020) seeking to generate new evidence and design tools to enable governments, investors and other key actors to deliver more effective policies and investments in sustainable agricultural intensification. The programme covers six countries in sub-Saharan Africa – Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia.

Over the course of the programme, SAIRLA partners have generated new evidence and design tools to enable governments, investors and other key actors that are supporting agriculture commercialisation and intensification to deliver more effective policies and investments. As part of this work, SAIRLA supports eight research projects that have successfully generated new evidence, and five national learning alliances that have been established to channel high quality evidence into national investment and policy making processes using a social learning approach.

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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the dialogue sessions on the Malawi Customary Land Act, 2016 held by the Facilitation Team of the Malawi National Learning Alliance (NLA) with various stakeholders. The stakeholders have discussed different contestations and generated common understanding on customary land in order to contribute to the development of a land legislative and governance framework that enables more equitable outcomes among the various stakeholders. The aims of the dialogue sessions are:

- i. To provide evidence for and illustrate the complexity of the land situation and reforms in Malawi.
- ii. Make the case that this complexity cannot be dealt with in a linear way but needs to be considered within an open and transparent multi-stakeholder dialogue.

The specific objectives for the dialogue mediated by the NLA are:

- To give stakeholders a platform to share views, perceptions, fears and hopes regarding the Customary Land Act, 2016.
- To enable stakeholders to better understand each other's voice, views, perceptions, fears and hopes about Customary Land Act, 2016 as a basis for generating consensus for developing a mutually acceptable land legislative and governance framework
- Identify opportunities and means to enhance future dialogues

The specific expected outcomes of the dialogue sessions include:

- Contextual situation and issues regarding access, control and tenure security over customary land, stakeholder agreements and disagreement identified.
- The desired future regarding the situation with customary land, stakeholder agreements and disagreements identified.
- Stakeholders' perspectives on Customary Land Act, 2016 and the extent to which it addresses current and future situations and aspirations identified.
- Possible pathways towards resolving the land contests and issues that stand in the way of a mutually acceptable land legislative and governance identified.

## **2. Background to the dialogue process**

In Malawi the NLA Facilitation Team embarked on dialogue sessions on customary land as part of the programme on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The programme has grown out of the global challenge for agriculture in which production must increase to meet the food and nutritional security demands of a growing population, but do so in a sustainable fashion. The aim of the SAIRLA programme is to generate, share and facilitate use of knowledge by decision makers (policy makers and investors) to develop Sustainable Agricultural Intensification (SAI) in ways that enable poorer smallholders, particularly women and youth to participate in and benefit from agricultural development.

In Malawi the wind of SAI is blowing at a time when there is a drive to commercialise agriculture. The Malawi Government (GoM), with support from development partners, has embarked on an ambitious programme of transforming the agricultural sector. The ambitions are well spelt out in policy pronouncements such as the Malawi Growth Development Strategy (MGDS), National Agricultural Policy (NAP), National Export Strategy Paper (NESP) and the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP). The common thread in these policy and investment strategy papers is that agriculture must be commercialised and productivity should be enhanced. Key in the policy aspirations is the need for clearly defined property land rights, land being a key resource for agricultural commercialisation. The Malawi Government has been engaged on land reforms since the late 1990s, and in 2016 enacted the Customary Land Act (CLA). Key issues dealt with by the CLA relate to land registration, land conflict resolution bodies, access to land (by women), security of tenure and land governance.

The NLA dialogue sessions on customary land draw on equity perspectives to construct evidence of what does and what doesn't work in relation to the propositions of the CLA. The CLA is critical because customary land remains the most important productive asset for the majority of Malawians. A high proportion of the land area in Malawi is managed by smallholders (between 65% and 75% is customary land according to Chirwa (2008), GoM

(2008) and GoM (2002), although this situation appears to be rapidly changing (Jayne, *et al.*, 2016)).

The dialogue sessions have been conducted through a multi-stakeholder platform for social learning processes called the National Learning Alliance (NLA) on SAI. The stakeholders are decision-makers with interest in and/ or influence on equitable SAI. They are at local, district and national levels and they include government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, media, research, private sector, chiefs, women's groups, local development committees, and the youth. Through these dialogue sessions:

- different perspectives on customary land have been shared and discussed
- scenarios and options on customary land have been jointly assessed
- more inclusive /joint decision-making on customary land has been discussed
- capacity and commitment to act has been discussed.

### **3. The Customary Land Act (2016)**

The customary land question in Malawi remains unresolved and it is complex. The regime has faced challenges including purported inherent insecure customary land rights. It is evident that Malawians are becoming concerned about the current land situation, particularly with respect to losing land to foreigners, although there is also a trend regarding acquisition of land by Malawian middle-scale land users (Jayne *et al.*, 2016).

Efforts to formalise land rights started in colonial times with “certificates of claim” as an acceptable basis of occupation of land (The Land Ordinance, 1951). The Land Act (1967) superseded the Land Ordinance (1951) and provided for registration of title. In 1996, the Malawi Government steered comprehensive Land Policy Reforms through a Presidential Commission on Land Inquiry (PCLI) in recognition of land pressure and tenure insecurity. In 2016 a new Customary Land Act (CLA) was enacted by Parliament with the aim of formalising land ownership and governance. Despite these efforts, divided opinions and views still exist: some stakeholders have supported while others have resisted the new land legislative and governance framework.

### **3.1 On-going processes in relation to the Customary Land Act (2016)**

Following the adoption of the National Land Policy (GoM, 2002) the Malawi Government embarked on reviewing, amending and developing new land and land related laws. The key provisions of the CLA focus on land registration, land conflict resolution bodies, land access (women rights), security of tenure, land governance and compensation.

The provisions of the CLA have been contested throughout this process: by some NGOs, tribal groupings and chiefs. Government of Malawi and some of its development partners have begun to implement the law with pilot projects delivered by civil society organisations (CSOs) in selected districts of Msimba, Kasungu, Phalombe, Chikwawa in awareness of this contestation. The pilot projects are intended to provide Government with evidence and lessons on how the CLA is working. Government and its partners intend to use the evidence and lessons to inform the implementation of the CLA in the rest of the country (Deputy Commissioner of Lands, personal communication, 2019).

### **3.2 Major, relevant and related provisions in the Customary Land Act (2016)**

The major provisions of the CLA include the creation of Traditional Land Management Areas (TLMAs) and land registration in form of customary estates. The CLA provides for title registration throughout the country for all land categories including Customary Estates. All land shall be subject to registration for purposes of determination of ownership. This supersedes the Customary Land Act, 1965 which recognised land ownership according to customary arrangements. Some specific provisions of the CLA, which are particularly relevant to the dialogue work are set out in Box 1.

**Box 1. Some relevant Customary Land Act provisions (original provision number has been retained)**

4. Land committees shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, be responsible for the management of all customary land in a Traditional Land Management Area.

5. (1) There shall be established in each Traditional Land Management Area, customary' land committees at a group village headman level.

5. (2) A Land Committee shall consist of:

- a) A Group Village Headman who shall be the chairperson;
- b) Six other persons elected by and from within the community, at least three of whom shall be women

8. (1) There shall be appointed a land clerk for each Traditional Land Management Area to serve as a secretary to any land committee appointed for the purposes of this Act.

20. (1) A customary estate shall be allocated by a land Customary committee

21. (1) A person, family unit, a group of persons recognised under customary law or who have formed themselves together as an association, a co-operative society or as any other body recognised by any written law, may apply to a land committee responsible for that land for the grant of a customary estate

24. (1) A land committee may require the payment of a fee on the grant of a customary' estate to an organisation or body.

26. A land committee may require the payment of annual rent for customary estates granted to an organisation or a body.

44. (1) There shall be established in every Traditional Land Management Area, a customary land tribunal to adjudicate on any disputes concerning customary land in the area.

(2) A customary land tribunal shall consist of—

- a) A presiding chairperson who shall be the Traditional Authority responsible for the area; and
- b) Six members of the community nominated by the Traditional Authority and approved by the Commissioner, at least three of whom shall be women

46. (1) There shall be established in every district, a district land tribunal which shall consist of the following—

- a) A presiding chair person who shall be the District Commissioner responsible for the District;
- b) Up to three Traditional Authorities;
- c) Three reputable persons that come from and reside in the district, two of whom shall be women, who shall be in office for a renewal term of three years; and
- d) The District Land Registrar who shall be the secretary

48. (1) There shall be established a Central Land Board consisting of the following—

- a) Resident Magistrate who shall preside over proceedings of the Board;
- b) Three Traditional Authorities, one from each region of Malawi, one of whom shall be a woman; and
- c) Two other members with good standing in society, one of whom shall be a woman.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Social characteristics related to land issues in the area

According to the Salima Social Economic Profile (SEP) 2017-2022 final draft, the district is located in the Central Region of Malawi, 103 kilometres east of Lilongwe, the country's capital city. It has a total land area of 2,196 square kilometres, which represents 2.3% of Malawi's total land area. It shares boundaries with Nkhota-kota to the north, Dowa and



Ntchisi to the north-west, Lilongwe to the west, and Dedza and Mangochi to the south. The entire eastern part of the district borders Lake Malawi.

The District has a projected population of 478,346 people according to the 2018 National Population Census (NSO, 2019). Predominantly, Chewa and Yao are the major tribes in the district. However, there are four other minor tribes namely Tonga, Tumbuka, Nyanja, and Ngoni. The main languages spoken are *Chichewa* and *Chiyao*. Christianity forms the substantive religion practiced in the district by 66% of the total population while Muslims represent 29% of the population, 4% have no specific religion and 2% practice religions other than Christianity and Islam. Salima district is predominantly characterised by a matrilineal system of marriage and inheritance where men usually reside at their wives' villages and mostly cultivate land belonging to the wife's family. In this case, children usually belong to the maternal side.

The main source of livelihood is subsistence agriculture practiced on about 107,400 hectares of customary farm land. Maize is the major food crop grown in the district followed by rice, sweet potatoes, and cassava (Salima SEP, 2017).

#### **4.2 Major agricultural activities/projects in the area**

The district experiences a general warm tropical climate with mean annual temperatures of 22<sup>o</sup> Celsius. Temperatures are highest between October and November and lowest around June and July. The district has vast potential for economic growth and expansion through agriculture and tourism (Salima SEP, 2017).

There are major agricultural projects taking place in Salima district. These include the Green Belt project, the Malawi Mangoes Project, and the Mtalimanja Sugar Project. There are also some estates. The main crops for smallholder farmers remain tobacco, maize, and legume crops such as soybeans, common beans, and groundnuts. Presently, the irrigation potential has not been fully utilised. Only 1400 hectares (2%) of arable land is being used for commercial agricultural purposes out of over 56,100 hectares available under this category. The district also has vast unutilised land and good climate and vegetation suitable for large-scale livestock rearing and allied industrial processing projects (Salima SEP, 2017).

Salima boasts of being one of Malawi's tourist havens. Lake Malawi makes up its entire eastern boundary providing almost 100 kilometres of fresh water shore with numerous exquisite beaches and colourful sand. There are 24 hotels and lodges, 32 rest houses, 5 public cottages, 3 camping sites and 4 guesthouses, providing tourist services to an increasingly growing number of foreign and domestic visitors, with capacity to accommodate more. The increase of infrastructure support initiatives, such as improved road networks, has boosted the Tourism Sector during the past 5 years (Salima SEP, 2017).

According to the Salima SEP 2017-2022 final draft, the key development issues identified in the district are: low food productivity, low household income levels, high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, high maternal and infant mortality rates, low access to safe water, high primary school drop-out rate, environmental degradation, poor accessibility due to under developed transport infrastructure, underdeveloped tourism industry, and high adult and youth unemployment.

#### **4.3 Activities related to implementation of the CLA in the area**

Salima is not one of the pilot districts for the implementation of the CLA. The NLA chose the district for consultations, however, because of the presence of the large agricultural projects and the tourism industry, both of which might have an impact on the dynamics in relation to the governance of customary land.

#### **4.4 Description of the members consulted (chiefs, women, youth, NGO/government front-line staff, community development committees)**

The meeting took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2018 at Salima District Headquarters.

Table **1** provides details of stakeholders consulted, and these included: District Executive Committee (DEC) members who are decision makers at district level with membership from government departments, NGOs, police and judiciary, and media amongst others.

**Table 1 Stakeholders consulted**

Stakeholder group	Detail	Male	Female
<b>District Executive Committee (DEC)</b>	Officers from government departments in Salima:	3	3
	District Social Welfare and Gender Office	4	2
	District Community Development Office	1	0
	District Lands Office	3	1
	Malawi Police	1	0
	Magistrate	6	3
	NGOs/Private Sector	3	1
	Media		

#### **4.5 Method for district consultation**

The Facilitation Team used a modified outcome mapping approach (OMA) to initiate a dialogue on the CLA. This being one of the first CLA consultations, the stakeholders were consulted together in one group. In the group, the members reflected on the current situation of land themes – access/ownership, tenure security, and control for the poor, youth and women. The stakeholders then reflected on changes they would like to see in access/ownership, tenure security, and control for the poor, youth and women in the next 5 to 10 years in a plenary discussion. Finally, the members were asked to assess the implications of proposals in the CLA on access/ownership, tenure security and control by the poor, women and the youth. See Appendix 1 for the checklist that is used for the consultations. Video and audio interviews were recorded as part of the process of generating evidence on how the CLA is envisaged to impact land access, land tenure security and access to land among women, men, youth and the chiefs.

## **5. Results of Focus Group Discussions**

### **5.1 Awareness and knowledge about the CLA**

When asked about who in the room was aware of or had ever heard about the recently approved land law, the participants indicated that they had heard about it. However, when asked how many participants had knowledge of the provisions of the Act, only 5% had more detailed knowledge of the contents of the law.

### **5.2 Current situation on access/ownership, tenure security, control for the poor, youth, women**

The participants explained that there are several ways that one can access land in the district and that issues of land ownership and land access are mutually exclusive. For instance, an individual can offer to sell a piece of land to another person but, to finalise that process, the chiefs have to be consulted and necessary payments have to be made before the deal is sealed. Alternatively, one can ask for any available piece of land from the chiefs, even though it is becoming almost impossible these days because chiefs no longer have idle land for sharing with its subjects. It was also reported that most people in this area acquire land through inheritance from their parents.

On issues of land ownership and security of tenure, most participants mentioned that registered land offers security of tenure, even though it mostly applies to estates and not customary land. Others were also of the view that, locally, people have tenure security because they have clear demarcations between one field of land and the other, hence no need for the formal registration of land. When asked the extent to which customary land is registered within the district, the responses indicated that; (i) the larger the land size, the more likely it is to be registered, (ii) registration is becoming more common, especially for land owned close to town (iii) foreigners are more likely than local villagers or Salima residents to register land

With regards to access of land by women and youth, it was evident from the discussions that women in Salima have easy access to land through inheritance and, in some cases, they can even purchase or rent more land. For the youth, unless they inherit the land from their parents, it's not easy for them to either buy or access it through the chiefs.

### **5.3 Changes would like and love to see in access/ownership, tenure security, control for the poor, the youth and women in the next 5 to 10 years**

The DEC stakeholders suggested that the government has to be clear as to what the law says on access to land by foreigners and how it would prevent land being lost to foreigners as is happening at an increasing rate currently.

### **5.4 Implications of the CLA**

#### **5.4.1 Challenges with the CLA**

When the DEC stakeholders were asked to share their views on the implications of the CLA, most of the participants expressed the view that the majority of victims of the new Act are going to be the poor. Another challenge that was flagged by the stakeholders was that not many people are knowledgeable of the provisions of the Act. This leads to a high level of speculation, most of which is negative. Finally, the participants indicated that there is significant resistance to the CLA from the chiefs, mostly due to lack of awareness of the provisions of the Act as well as to an anticipated sense of loss of power through the new processes.

#### **5.4.2 Benefits of the CLA**

Despite the negative consequences of the CLA captured above, the DEC stakeholders also shared some positive implications as follows;

- There will be increased land tenure security through registration
- Women will have tenure security as individuals
- Control mechanisms put in place at village level would ensure that land would not be sold aimlessly and that no land would be sold in the first three years after being registered.

## **6. Conclusions of Facilitation Team**

### **6.1 Contextual situation and issues regarding access, control and tenure security over customary land, stakeholder agreements & disagreement**

The DEC members agree that, in Salima, access, control and tenure security over customary land is still embedded in Chewa culture. Some members feel culture should

continue to lead the management and governance of customary land matters. However, culture is being challenged by the growing land markets in the district and the growing population. The people can no longer hold on to the land using cultural mechanisms alone.

## **6.2 Stakeholders' perspectives on the Customary Land Act, 2016 and the extent to which it addresses current and future situations and aspirations**

Reflecting on the CLA, the DEC members see it as a law to victimise the majority poor. They fear that the law is a way for the government to control every piece of land in the country through the offering of title deeds and the land registration exercise. They indeed question whether security through title deeds will benefit or further marginalise the already disadvantaged groups such as the youth and the poor. There is concern that the poor would have problems affording registration, hence the exercise might only benefit the rich and foreigners.

These concerns are in agreement with similar debates and findings on customary land laws in Africa (Chitinge & Bwalya Umar, 2018). For instance, in the edited volume on Contemporary Customary Land Issues in Africa, Chitinge and Bwalya Umar, as well as other contributors in this volume agree that customary land issues are complex since they involve complex colonial histories, policy issues, politics, power struggles as well as peoples' livelihoods. Our findings specifically show that, much as there are positive implications associated with the CLA, careful analysis of how the implementation of such a policy nationwide would affect women, youth and poor people's livelihoods is essential.

## **6.3 Possible pathways for resolving the land contests and issues that stand in the way of a mutually acceptable land legislative and governance**

The DEC members flagged the need to provide information and educate people about the provisions of the CLA to clear up speculations about the Act. Finally, the participants also indicated that there is a lot of resistance from the chiefs, mostly due to lack of awareness of the provisions of the Act as well as to an anticipated sense of loss of power through the new processes.

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## 8. Appendix 1: Checklist for district and community stakeholder engagement meetings

### Preamble

During the introductions with the community or district stakeholders explain the aim of the meetings and the methodology to be used. Split the community stakeholders into Focus Groups of youth, women, Area Development Committee and chiefs. District stakeholders should be split into civil servants, NGOs. Use the matrix here below to guide the discussions. Mention to the entire group that after the FGDs with the split groups, the results will be presented in plenary.

### Key questions

Modified Outcome Mapping Matrix

Describe access to land over the timelines given in the tables below. For each change in access to land per respective group of people in the first column provide reason (s).

Access of land	Current situation	Next five years	Next 10 years	Future
Women				
Men				
Youth				
Chiefs				

Describe land tenure security over the timelines given in the tables below. For each change in land tenure security per respective group of people in the first column provide reason (s).

Land tenure security	Now	Next five years	Next 10 years	Future
Women				
Men				
Youth				
Chiefs				

Describe control over land over the timelines given in the tables below. For each changes or failure to change in control over land over per respective group of people in the first column provide reason (s).

Control over land	Now	Next five years	Next 10 years	Future
Women				
Men				
Youth				
Chiefs				